

Always More Glorious
Mark 9:2-9

Once upon a time there was a boy who went off to college. A few weeks after leaving, he called home and his brother answered. They visited a few minutes, and the college student said, "How's Tabby doing?" Tabby was his cat, and he had had to leave him home when he left. His brother said, "Tabby's dead." The college student was shocked and asked what happened. His brother explained how Tabby died. The college student said, "That was unkind of you to tell me so abruptly that Tabby was dead. You should have broken it to me gently. You should have said that Tabby climbed up on the roof of the house, and you couldn't get him down. And when he tried to get down on his own, he fell and injured himself. You rushed him to the veterinarian, who did all he could to save him. But Tabby didn't make it. You should break that kind of news to people gently." His brother said that he understood, and he apologized for his thoughtlessness and that he would try to do better in the future. After they visited a little longer, the student asked, "By the way, how is grandma doing?" And his brother said, "Well, uh, Grandma climbed up on the roof of the house, and we couldn't get her down..."

I don't tell that story just to get a cheap laugh, although I am certainly not above trying to get a cheap laugh. The idea of breaking news to people gently is important. Some people understand that and some don't.

A few weeks before I proposed to my wife, I told her I would be proposing to her. I know that some people like shocking their prospective fiancés by surprising them. We hear all these stories about the girl being overwhelmed and crying when the boy pops the question to her. As I've told you before, I'm not a great fan of drama. When people are surprised and shocked, they say and do things that they might not have said and done if they weren't so caught up in the emotions of the moment. When a boy pops the question to a girl, she might cry great tears of joy. Then again, she may do like that girl did a few years ago when her boyfriend proposed to her on camera at an Astros baseball game. She slapped him and got up and walked out while thousands of people watched it all on the big screen. I'm a big proponent of breaking news to people gently.

Apparently Jesus was too. If you look carefully at the Gospel of Mark, the whole first half of the gospel is about Jesus breaking the news of who he was to his disciples gently. If you read Mark carefully, you see that when Jesus called the disciples to follow him, they thought they were following a great teacher. Later they discovered that he could also cast out demons. Later still they learned that he had the power to heal the sick. Then they saw that Jesus not only had power to heal the sick, he even had power to raise the dead back to life, when he took the hand of a dead girl, and she opened her eyes and stood up. Then when he fed the five thousand with the five loaves of bread and two fish and when he quieted the storm, and walked on water, they learned he could work miracles not only on people, but on nature itself. Each time they learned more about Jesus they were amazed all over again. They kept asking, "Who is this man to be able to do these things?"

It wasn't until nearly the middle of Mark's gospel, the eighth chapter, just a few weeks before Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, that the disciples learned that Jesus was the Messiah, and he wasn't the one who told them then. When Jesus asked them who they thought he was, it was Peter who said, "You are the Messiah."

Now, you have to read this very carefully. In Mark Peter says, "You are the Messiah." Is that what you remember him saying? No. You remember Peter saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." That comes from Matthew. In the Gospel of Matthew Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Which one is right? Well, most scholars agree that Mark was the first of the Gospels to be written. Matthew and Luke both had copies of Mark in hand when they wrote their gospels. They wrote them because they wanted to add information that Mark didn't include in his gospel. They also changed some of what Mark wrote. Matthew just felt that Peter simply saying that Jesus was the Messiah wasn't adequate. Everyone knows that Jesus is also the Son of God, so why not just say so?

But Mark tells us that Peter simply said, "You are the Messiah." He says nothing about Jesus being the Son of God. And there is a huge difference between being the messiah and being the Son of God. There were many messiahs in the history of Israel. A messiah is an ordinary human being called by God to save the people from their enemies and lead them to a time of peace and prosperity. In the Book of Judges, all those judges were Messiahs. King David was a messiah. Moses and Elijah were messiahs.

Peter didn't say that Jesus was the Son of God, because that was beyond his wildest thinking. He never imagined that this man they were following was the Son of God—not until six days later.

Six days later Jesus took Peter and James and John up on a mountaintop. There Jesus was transfigured before their eyes as he became dazzling white, radiating the shekinah glory of God. The disciples saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. And they heard the voice of God saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

That was when these three disciples understood for the first time who Jesus really was. And Jesus told them not to tell the other disciples. Apparently the others weren't ready to handle this revelation yet. In other words, during the three years that the disciples followed Jesus, they didn't know who he really was. Only Peter, James and John learned near the end of Jesus' life that he was the Son of God. The rest of the disciples didn't know until Easter Sunday afternoon, when he appeared to them in the Upper Room.

Now, why is that important? Because Jesus has never stopped breaking it to us gently. Jesus has continued to gradually and gently reveal to us who he is. Gradually we have come to understand that Jesus is the savior, not just of Israel but of all humanity. We've come to understand that he is the eternal Word of God, who along with the Father and the Holy Spirit is the Creator and Ruler of the universe.

And we still haven't reached the end of all that Jesus is. In fact, I don't think we ever will. I believe that we will spend all eternity with Jesus breaking it to us gently who he is. I believe we will be astounded over and over again as he gradually reveals more and more to us.

I like that. I don't think I would like not having more discoveries to make and more to learn. You know the television commercial where the man is looking at the

internet and a message comes up saying, “You have now seen everything on the internet. Please start over from the beginning.” I would not like that.

Thank goodness, we will never know all there is to know. We have a lot to look forward to. With Jesus there is always something new and exciting and wonderful coming our way. Jesus is always more glorious.

And because Jesus is always more glorious, life is always more glorious.

Life should never be boring for us.

When I was a Court Reporter, I served the 145th Judicial District Court. We covered Nacogdoches County and Cherokee County. Now Cherokee County was a small, rural county. In the three years I worked for that court, I think we tried three cases. We would spend three months in Nacogdoches. Then we would spend three months driving over to Rusk every day. There was absolutely nothing for me to do in Rusk when we weren’t trying a case. And my judge insisted that I go with him and sit at my desk every day with nothing to do. I was so bored I thought I would lose my mind. I began praying, “Lord, save me from this boredom.” That was when I was called into the pastoral ministry. Let me tell you, since then life has never been boring again.

When you walk with Jesus, life is never boring. Challenging—at times. But even the trials that come with serving Christ always result in something more glorious than you can imagine.

Jesus is constantly revealing new things to us—about himself, about ourselves, about people, about the world, about life.

There have been many times that Christ has shown me truths that were so exciting and so helpful, and I’ve said, “Lord, why didn’t you show me this a long time ago?” And the answer is always the same, “You weren’t ready yet.”

Jesus continues to break it to us gently. As we are ready to let go of the things we thought we knew and open up to the things Jesus is trying to show us, we grow and learn. But letting go of the things we thought we knew is painful and difficult. It takes faith. It takes a lot of faith.

When I went to seminary I knew everything there was to know about the Gospel. I had all the answers. At seminary I discovered I didn’t even know most of the questions, much less the answers. Soon I was so confused, I didn’t know what to think or what to believe. One night I was lying in bed, staring at the dark ceiling, and I was in utter despair. I prayed, and I said, “Lord, if I died tonight, I don’t know what would happen to me. There are so many things I don’t understand.” And the Lord spoke to me and said, “You don’t have to have all the answers. I do. Just trust me to show you what you need to know when you need to know it.” That night I discovered that my faith had been in my ability to understand the things of God, and not in God. That night I learned to stop trusting my understanding and start trusting God.

Christ is constantly revealing new and wonderful things to me. But he always does it gently. Only when I am ready to let go of the things I think I know does Christ show me more of what is really true.

Christ has ever more glorious things to show you. But he will always do it gently. Have enough faith to let go of the things you think you know and let Christ show you new and wonderful things.

Dr. Wesley Welborn, Senior Pastor